



Landcare Notes

Monitoring and evaluating group activities

Monitoring your Landcare group's activities and projects provides valuable information to everyone involved in the project about how your work is progressing and the results you have achieved.

'Evaluation' means you assess the results of what you have done and learn from the experience.

Monitoring and evaluation programs can help you control your funding and other resources more efficiently, as well as generating better results and giving members more opportunities for learning.

This Landcare Note outlines the important aspects of monitoring and evaluation and where to find more information.

What is monitoring and evaluation?

When you have spent time planning a project and are ready to start work, it's natural to just want to get on with it. But while you are confident of success, it's important to think about how to track your progress once the project starts.

It's very easy for a project to steer away from its intended aims if it isn't watched closely. Monitoring and evaluation can help ensure your projects stay on track and minimise any potential risks.

The first step in managing successful projects is working out what your group wants to change (see Landcare Notes: 2.1 Planning; 2.2 Strategic Planning).

Once you know the current situation, the issues you want to tackle and what you can do to address those issues, then you can set up a system to measure your success.

What information to collect

There is a range of information that can be collected and recorded in order to keep track (monitor) of whether you are achieving what you set out to do.

'Monitoring' is simply a way of measuring your actions and activities to see what works and what doesn't, and if you are making a difference. You may be measuring:

- The level of weed or rabbit infestation or the severity and location of soil erosion, in your area
- The number of people involved, time spent on activities, number of meetings
- How many people attended a tree planting or field day
- The health of your group – if membership and involvement is rising or falling
- Works achieved, such as area of improved pasture, length of river banks fenced, areas treated with weedicide, as well as the social benefits of working together
- Long-term outcomes from your work – the number of local birds returning, the number of new members joining, growth and development of group projects.

Collecting lots of information can be easy but it may not be useful. So, establish what you are trying to achieve, then work out what you are going to measure and the best ways of doing it to provide the information you want.

Deciding what aspects of a project will be monitored and evaluated should be done in consultation with the group, and with other stakeholders such as funding bodies if possible – they might have good suggestions.



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Some examples of what you could collect

It makes sense to monitor things that are simple and easy to measure but can show you some results. For example:

- How many people attended the event (in numbers)
- How many trees were planted
- What weeds have been controlled
- What size was the area that was cleared of weeds (in hectares)
- Are people doing things differently as a result of your project?

You might also choose to monitor scientific data such as the level of salinity, people's observations and comments, the level of participation, products, any changes in behaviour, on-site works completed, surveys of members or participants and photos taken at the same spot ('photo points') that show what the area looked like before and after your activities.

How to measure it

There are many tools that can help you collect information. Remember that some information, however simple, is better than no information at all, because it is a tangible way of keeping track of the project and measuring your success.

Decide the type of information you are going to collect before you start work on the project or activity, and set a starting point or baseline measure so you can compare the results later.

Some information can be collected regularly and you can practice continuous evaluation. This will be useful for your group and others who are involved, so any changes over time can be recognised.

Evaluation – what the information tells you

Collecting information is useful – but only if that information is evaluated. What does your information tell you? Evaluation is about looking at all the measurements and information you have collected and assessing their importance and the messages they give you.

Evaluating information allows you to:

- Identify any problems or barriers that might hinder your success
- Plan ways of dealing with the resources of people, skills, funds and materials/equipment you have available, or with any problems that arise
- Assess the impact of group activities
- Make changes in light of new experiences and unpredicted outcomes
- Learn from experience, share those experiences and celebrate achievements
- Provide reports to members and supporters.

How to do it

It is often wise to have several people involved in developing the evaluation process you will use. You may need to seek expertise from outside the group on what to measure and how to go about it – talk first to your Landcare coordinator, or staff from other agencies such as Department of Primary Industries.

When you are collecting information from people, remember to tell them why you're doing it and what the benefits are. They are more likely to help again, if you need collect more information

Some key tools

Monitoring

- Keep good records of costs, materials, time, numbers of members involved and



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outside resources used. See Landcare Note 7.1: Keeping Records.

- Map and measure areas and take other on-ground information both before and after the work, using a scaled mapping base. This could include using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and Global Positioning System (GPS). See Landcare Notes 6.3: Using Technology; 5.4 Project Site Planning and Management.
- Take before and after photographs from the same position (called 'photo points') so you can see the visual change over time.
- Conduct a survey of members' ideas, attitudes and level of involvement for specific issues and activities.
- Get outside expertise to measure more complex things, such as native plant identification, soil analysis, bird populations, salinity levels and nutrient levels. Taking these measures before and after your activities can help determine if you made a difference.

Evaluation

Assessing the outcomes is the next step. If you are comparing numbers, areas and costs (etc), the outcome should be reasonably clear. However it can sometimes be difficult, especially if you are dealing with people's ideas and judgements, or if there are no clear results from your measures.

Many factors can affect the outcome so ask an expert for advice if the results are difficult to determine. Some of the evaluation techniques that have been used in Victoria for agricultural and natural resource management projects include:

- Evaluation workshops – where those who have been involved and have a stake in the project (group members, contractors, funding agency) are involved in the assessment process.
- Individual members tell their story of the 'most significant change' – the 'story' shows how they see the outcome of the project or activity. A collection of different members' stories are read and discussed to form the basis of the evaluation.
- A simple interactive '+/Δ' (plus – delta) method can be used for evaluation – go around the group and ask several people to describe one positive experience from the activity and one thing they think should be changed for the better. This kind of anecdotal feedback can be very useful as an adjunct to other information you might collect.

Further references

Victorian Landcare gateway:

www.landcarevic.org.au

Landcare Coordinator in your region – contact your CMA or nearest DPI office

Australian Government (2007) – *Natural Resources Management – Monitoring and Evaluation*:

<http://www.nrm.gov.au/me/index.html>

Davies, R, and Dart, J (2005) – *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique. A Guide to its Use*:

www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf

Greening Australia (1998) – *Participatory Evaluation for Landcare and Catchment Groups. A Guide For Facilitators*:

http://live.greeningaustralia.org.au/nativevegetation/pages/pdf/Authors%20W%2F14b_Woodhill_Robins.pdf

Learners Project Information Sheet No. 2 *Evaluation and Impact Assessment*:

www.evaluateit.org/resources/infosheets/evaluation.doc

National Landcare Program Evaluation Coordinators (1997) – *Setting Up For Success – A Guide for Designing, Managing and Evaluating Projects*:

<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2713703>



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Landcare Note 5.5

Related Landcare Notes

This Landcare Note is one of a series. These notes provide an excellent guide for the ongoing operation of your group.

Landcare Note 2.1: Planning

Landcare Note 2.2: Strategic Planning

Landcare Note 5.4: Project Site Planning and Management

Landcare Note 6.3: Using Technology

Landcare Note 7.1: Keeping Records

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